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## Dean Logan's Blog: RIP Civil Rights Icon Fred Shuttlesworth

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# ***Dean Logan's Blog***

## RIP Civil Rights Icon Fred Shuttlesworth

Posted by David Logan on 10/06/2011 at 10:31 AM



Somewhat overshadowed by media reports of the death of Apple's Steve Jobs yesterday was word of the death of Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, the courageous leader of the civil rights movement in Birmingham, Alabama. Perhaps best known as a founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Rev. Shuttlesworth convinced Dr. Martin Luther King to make Birmingham the center of resistance to racism after the nonviolent effort sputtered in its first major campaign, in Albany Georgia. Rev. Shuttlesworth believed that national media coverage of the brutal police response to peaceful demonstrators would galvanize public opinion across the United States, and the images of Birmingham authorities, led by the outspokenly racist sheriff Eugene "Bull" Connor, unleashing police dogs and fire hoses on peaceful protesters was beamed into millions of living rooms across the country (including mine, in the DC suburbs) had just that powerful effect. It was also Rev. Shuttlesworth who convinced Attorney General Robert Kennedy to send in federal marshals to protect the Freedom Riders, as they sought to desegregate public transportation across the South.

Rev. Shuttlesworth was controversial for his willingness to confront racism even in the civil rights community, and his colleagues initially greeted with initial skepticism the idea that nonviolence would succeed in a dangerous place like Birmingham (which had been nicknamed "Bomingham"). And his personal courage was remarkable: when asked why he would regularly subject himself to the risk of police beatings he waggishly replied "The Lord knows that I live in a hard town, so he gave me a hard head."

Late in life he was recognized for his courage and contributions, and President Obama released a statement yesterday: "America owes Fred Shuttlesworth a debt of gratitude." For those readers too young to know why so many people of my generation will mourn Rev. Shuttlesworth's passing, I encourage you to check out the Pulitzer Prize winning documentary "[Eyes on the Prize](#)," and read a [report from NPR](#) for coverage of his death in the media .

RIP a great American.

